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Pulpit Preaching

LUME 10 NOVEMBER, 1957 Number 11

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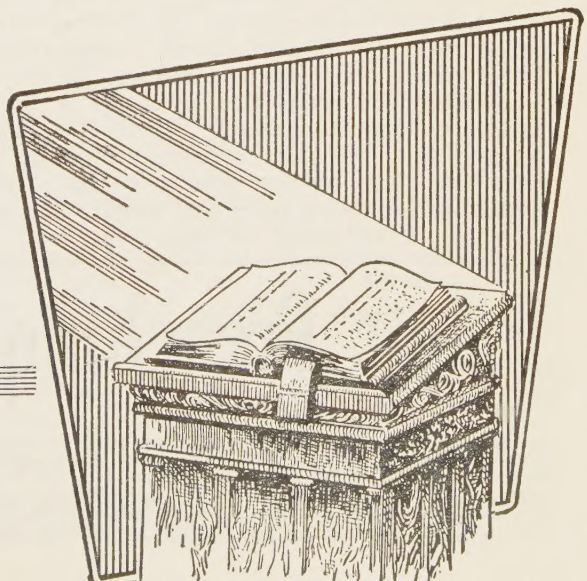

A PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL
FOR MINISTERS

Editorial Comments

The editors and publishers of *Pulpit Preaching* join in extending our season's greetings to readers in forty-eight states, Canada and beyond the seas. We hope that this issue may be of particular value as readers enter into the varied ministerial responsibilities of the Advent period.

"The Heart of Christmas," this month's first theme, includes sermons of Advent and Christmas. We believe you will find Dr. Macleod's article to be especially helpful. "Day of Beginnings," our second theme, emphasizes preaching ideas for the Sundays of the new year.

Next month's themes will be "Great Words of Faith: Love" and "Life in Christ." The January subjects will be "Psalm 23" and "The Prodigal Son."

—o—

Books for Pulpit Preaching

Christian Maturity is E. Stanley Jones' most recent volume of devotions. The 364 daily readings represent a quest for maturity—("We are very immature people attempting to handle very mature problems") —which is not, the author urges, a hopeless quest. In a day when much facile writing is appearing on the theme of maturity, it is good to have this stimulating presentation which centers in "Jesus, Incarnate Maturity." (Abingdon, 384 pp., $1.50.)

Theodore F. Adams, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Richmond and president of the Baptist World Alliance, is one of America's best-known preachers. *Making the Most of What Life Brings,* his first book of sermons, shows how a Christian can meet life's inevitable problems and difficulties. The sermons, which are intimate and radiant, tell how we may make the most of life's interruptions, imperfections, inequalities, imperatives, etc. (Harper, 145 pp., $2.50.)

Letting God Help You by John A. Redhead concerns the ways by which God helps us and how we may become recipients of this help. The author points to the power available for mind, body and spirit. The au-

(Continued on page 18)

The Miracle of Christmas

FRANK A. COURT

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Christmas is God's miracle of happiness! Quite frankly, I do not see how anyone can explain the beauty of Christ's birth. Literary scholars stumble over and try to analyze where Shakespeare found the genius that set him apart in the literary world. To date, I have read no satisfactory explanation of how this genius in the realm of literature discovered his creative power. If we cannot explain the creative genius of a Shakespeare or the political sagacity of a Lincoln, or the musical ability of a Handel, how can we expect to ever explain the miracle of Christ's birth.

All of life, to me, is a miracle. God speaks a word of law and order through the physical creation of the world. He also has His word of exquisite beauty on every page of nature's story. As God reveals himself through the creative world, why should it seem strange that, through personality, the beauty of the Christ, He speaks his final word of love. There is just as much miracle to the birth of Christ and no more than you will discover in the beauty of the dawn, the power that holds our universe in order, the spirit that first brought life into being. It is the eternal mystery, and the reverent mind bows in worship as humbly we understand that, in Christ, God's life is touching ours. But the exact explanation of how is often beyond our limited capacity to understand. This we do know: Christ is born. The Spirit of God was revealed in and through the Christ-life in a way never revealed before or since. He still is the doorway to the very heart of God.

The real miracle of Christmas is how the Christ spirit and heart has lived throughout the generations. How could Christ's teachings of love, peace, and good will endure against the might and power of the Caesars? But here we are once again celebrating at Christmas-time the glory of Christ's birth

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Pulpit Preaching

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Published and printed monthly at Jackson, Miss., by the Tombigbee Publishing Co. Subscription Price: U. S. and Canada $4.00 per year; other countries $4.50 per year: single copies $.5). Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Jackson Mississippi under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Address subscription orders to PULPIT PREACHING, Post Office Box 2088, Jackson, Mississippi. In Great Britain, address subscriptions to Religious Book Shop, 79 Reginald St., Luton, Bed., England.

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The Heart of Christmas

Resources for Christmas Sermons

DONALD MACLEOD, Priceton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey

The main festivals of the Christian Year resent the average preacher with a two-old responsibility. First, there is the need o say something new and fresh, and, second, here is the urgency to rescue the Chris-an significance of these seasons from the oguls of the commercial world. The for-er involves the content of preaching, while e latter concerns the ends to which it is irected. In few seasons of the Christian ear does this responsibility challenge the reacher more forcibly than during the hristmas season, and particularly the four eeks of Advent that precede the loveliest all our religious festivals.

Preachers in the more liturgical traditions ave no real problem regarding the choice subject matter, because each Sunday dur-g Advent has its own venerable designa-on. The Episcopal clergyman, for example, llows a pattern which has become a time-nored tradition in his denomination. The irst Sunday sets the tone for the Advent ason with a plea for God's gracious help "cast off the works of darkness, and to t on the whole armor of light." The key-te is preparation. The Second Sunday is ible Sunday, during which our attention given to the Holy Scriptures as the ve-cle through which the long story of God's velation and ultimate incarnation is rought to men. The Third Sunday is con-rned with the ministry of the Church and s responsibility and share in being a her-d of the coming of the Christchild. Then e Fourth Sunday attempts to exhort the eople to more worthy living because "the rd is at hand." The career and witness John the Baptist in pointing to the Com-g One call the Christian congregation to milar humility and self-effacement. Final-, there is Christmas Day. The season of reparation is complete and the focus of at-ntion and emphasis is upon the central ent of the ages — the Incarnation of the n of God.

Ministers of the non-liturgical traditions ay follow a similar strategy, and there are idences that this is being done increasing-. Those, however, who do not follow this liturgical pattern, or even the guidance of a Lectionary, ought to plan their preaching at least with the two-fold responsibility in mind: to say something fresh and to do so effectively and purposefully. Advent is a season of spiritual preparation for Christmas, just as Lent is before Easter. What could be more appropriate than a series of sermons that would prepare the congregation for a fitting and reverent celebration of the Birth of Christ? This series would include properly some new insights into the medley of customs that make up our Christion tradition, new interpretations of the old texts (including a ban on the hackneyed, "No Room in the Inn"), and a bold attempt to rescue an exclusively religious festival from the glitter and tinsel of paganism.

A suggested series of sermons for the four Sundays of the Advent Season is as follows:

First Sunday: "What Is the Meaning of Christmas?" The text is 2 Corinthians 4:6: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Shrist." Here the true meaning of Christmas is spelled out for us in contrast with the ideas of those people for whom Christmas is either drudgery (the spiritually unromantic), or opportunism (the merchant pirates), or a page from fairyland (the emotional addicts). This text declares the real fact behind Christmas — that something happened in spiritual pattern of the ages which has made everything different subsequently. Not only the fact of Christmas, but its purpose also is indicated, namely, to bring the life of God closer to men. Hence Christmas is basically and unavoidably a Christian festival at whose center is not merely merriment but the element of sacrifice. None of us ever does his best by Christmas unless and until it includes a new commitment to what this great spiritual fact claims and demands.

Second Sunday: "What Will You Find This Christmas?" The text is John 1:12: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." A striking contrast may be drawn between the mod-

ern Christmas and that first event with its pivotal and determinative place in the history and life of man. From it a new opportunity and privilege came to men ("As *many* as received him . . ."). With it appeared the means whereby a man could become something ("to them gave he power . . . ."). By it the pattern was supplied by which man could realize his spiritual destiny ("to become sons of God"). And what is more, Christmas gave man the hope that he could become what inwardly he felt he ought to be. All who receive Christ will be given not merely power to be (merely to live), but more important, the power to become children of God.

Third Sunday: "What Will You See This Christmas?" This could be prefaced by two texts: Luke 2:15 and John 3:16. Under the glamor of the annual journey to Bethlehem ("Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing . . . ."), there is the reality of the historical fact, "God so loved the world that he *gave* . . . ." This fact points to God's estimate of man, his hope in him, and his intention for him. Also it suggests how clearly the Eternal mind understood man's situation that it would require incarnation, death, and resurrection to accomplish what was to be each man's right in the purposes of God. Christmas is efficacious only for those who see in it the fact that "God hath visited and redeemed his people."

Fourth Sunday: "What Is the Joy of Christmas?" The text is Luke 2:10: "Fear not: for, behold I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . ." To many, the joy of Christmas is something superficial — receiving gifts, merry-making, family parties, etc. All these, however, are so very far removed from the real joy that Christmas brings and implies. And this joy is real, we must not forget, only insofar as our Christianity itself is real. Furthermore, this joy is expressed through several facets. It is the joy of creation. God has begun a new creation in Jesus Christ, but through him it was to be shared by man. The new man in Christ will so live that all he touches, leads, and shapes will be different. It is also the joy of redemption. What God has done in Christ reclaims those whom sin has spoiled and they experience the joy of going on to be themselves redeemers in his name. And then it is the joy of realization. The writer to the Hebrews said, "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross . . . ." Fullness of joy comes to those who realize in themselves what God desires for them and who are willing to pay the price it entails.

QUOTATIONS

If Christmas is merely a memory of things past, it cannot heal us. But if it is an awakening to things present, it can be the most healing event ever known. If we can believe that the impossible has happened and that though we have shut him out, God comes into our world just the same, then a restored humanity and a restored creation may be born again in us today.

—David E. Roberts, in *The Grandeur and Misery of Man* (Oxford).

* * *

So often today, people give gifts to each other, but give nothing to Christ, nothing to God.

What kind of Christmas gift would be suitable to give to God? It is a principle of wise giving that the gift be something that can be used . . . . A Christmas gift to God must be something he can use . . . . He cannot use a person's easy, sentimental admiration for Jesus. Mere words, no matter how beautiful, are no acceptable gift to God.

The gift of your *mind* — that would be a gift God wants and can use.—Halford E. Luccock, in *Unfinished Business* (Harper).

* * *

The joy of Christmas is at least in part the joy of discovering that our insignificant lives have meaning to God.

—Robert E. Luccock, in *If God Be For Us* (Harper).

* * *

Christmas began, not in Bethlehem, but in Heaven, not in the birth of a babe, but in the Mind and Will of God.

—Leslie E. Cooke, in *Faith Stakes A Claim* (Independent).

* * *

The experience of the living Christ brings us into possession of a knowledge that nothing in earth can shake. It is no use for you or for me to have a philosophy about Christ, to classify him with the prophets or with the sages of the past, if we do not know him as our ever-living Lord. Sometime you will have to come to terms with Jesus Christ. Why not now?—Hugh T. Kerr, in *Design for Christian Living* (Westminster).

* * *

That hour when Mary brought forth her Child was the hour on which all time turns, all history hinges. It was God's zero hour for which all retrospect had previously prepared, and from which all in prospect has since derived. Men have found that event fraught with such enduring consequences that by it they have divided the years, and so date all other happenings BC. or A.D.

—W. Francis Gibbons, in *The Heart of Religion* (Marshall, Morgan & Scott, Ltd.).

* * *

He [Paul] acted on the principle that Jesus had come not to make life easy but to make men great.—William Barclay, in *The Acts of the Apostles* (Westminster).

* * *

Jesus is not merely a very nice, neighborly person who lived some nineteen hundred years ago in Palestine. Jesus splits history! Jesus is not merely a religious being whom we may confine to our churches, leaving him within the four walls of our church buildings. Jesus splits history. Jesus is not merely a historical person who slightly altered the course of events and whom we may easily forget. Jesus splits history.

—Charles H. Schmitz, in *Windows Toward God* (Abingdon).

* * *

Laurence Housman once produced his nativity play, "Bethlehem," for a two-week run in the great hall of the University of London. The British censor insisted, however, that the Virgin Mary was not to speak, nor could the Christ Child appear. To get around this last restriction, an electric light was hidden in the manger, its diffused radiance representing the child supposed to be lying there. One of the last scenes in the play called for all the stage lights to be lowered until only the glow from the manger was shown on the stage. It was an effective moment except at one performance when some confused stagehand turned off the manger bulb along with all the others, leaving the stage in total darkness. Then through the darkness and silence cut the manager's fierce, indignant whisper: "Hey! You've switched off Jesus."

—Wilfred C. Lockart, in *Bethlehem: The Meaning and Significance of Christmas for Our Day* (United Church Publishing House).

The Angels' Song of Glory

J. R. BROKHOFF, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Charlotte, N. C.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is well pleased.
Luke 2:14

Christmas is always associated with music. We think of Christmas bells ringing. Choirs sing special anthems appropriate for the festival. Carols always go with Christmas. That is not surprising, for on the first Christmas the message of the birth of Christ was ascompanied by the singing of an anthem by choirs of angels. On that first Christmas night, a light from heaven fell upon the earth and scared simple shepherds. An angel preached the first Christmas sermon: "I bring you good news of a great joy . . . for to you is born this day . . . Savior." Then the shepherds heard singing like earth had never heard before. Choirs of angels sang in a most celestial way a song of glory which has been repeatedly sung by Christians down the centuries and which we sing every Sunday morning in our liturgy. The angels' quality of singing was never surpassed by choirs of men. The message of their song was never surpassed in importance. It was like a ladder stretching from earth to heaven. It brought heaven on earth and took earth to heaven.

I

First, the angels looked toward heaven and sang praise to God: "Glory to God in the highest." Many today would not join the angels in this song. They would rather sing, "Glory to man in the highest." They firmly believe that man is getting better every day in every way. Man is becoming with time more and more the master of his fate and the captain of his soul. Increasingly, they hope, he is becoming self-sufficient and independent, even of God. As they admire the latest developments in engineering and design, they would shout: "Glory to man in the highest." Take a look at the Empire State building, the tallest in the world. There is a monument to man's ability — Glory to man in the highest! Consider man's supersonic planes, which can fly so fast that they surpass their own bullets and shoot themselves down when they fire their guns. Think of the UNIVAC, the human-made brain which can solve a problem in hours that takes hundreds of men months to figure out. When we consider these things, we want to sing, "Glory to man in the highest."

Men today may want to change the angels' song, but the angels on this Christmas night would still sing, "Glory to God in the highest." They are wiser than men and understand the goodness and greatness of God more than men do. They sing "Glory to God" because of what God had given to the world at Christmas. He gave men a Saviour. This child will be called Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

This is man's most needed gift. God knows ours is a fallen race. He realizes that we are lost and condemned creatures. If we think we are inherently good, we need no Saviour. If we need no Saviour, then Christmas is meaningless except for a sentimental wave of good will. Do we think we can make ourselves respectable by a little extra moral effort? Do we think we can erase sin by changing environment and by better breeding? Who can cleanse his soul? Who can forgive himself for sin against God? Men, the truth is, are sitting in gross darkness. They are in the prison house of sin sitting helplessly and hopelessly. In this state of affairs God brings light and hope to condemned men. He sends a Saviour to save us from sin and to bring us the truth and love of God. If we know and appreciate this fact, we too will join the angels in singing, "Glory to God in the highest."

II

The angels sang to God's glory also because of the motive of His gift of a Saviour. Why did God send His Son? Was he trying to vindicate Himself because, having made man, He failed when man disobeyed? Was He now trying to save face? Did God send His Son because man was worthy and deserving of the gift? God sent His Son because He loved the world. That is why John 3:16 is called the Bible's greatest verse: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son." In giving His Son, God paid the supreme price. Do we realize what it cost God to send Jesus? It meant being humiliated by coming into human form. It meant emptying himself of divine privileges, powers, and prerogatives. As the years went by, God in Jesus had to endure human limitations, disgrace, and suffering. This is the mystery and miracle of Christmas: how God who is greater than the universe He made could be in the form of a Baby of Bethlehem, one so helpless, innocent, and dependent.

All of this God did because of love. It was a complete and perfect love. In the baby Jesus God gave His full self. God was in Christ. In Jesus God gave Himself to the world. This surely has significance for us today. If God so loved us, should we not love Him in return? How could we keep from loving Him? If we know how much He loved us in sending Christ, we would be the worst ingrates if we withheld our love to Him. Jesus taught that a man's highest duty was to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. On the other hand, this love to God has a human counterpart. If we love God in response to His love, should we not love one another? This Jesus whose birthday we celebrate said when he became a man, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you." Christmas accordingly is a festival of love and good will among men. That is what makes this season so glorious — love among men abounds in terms of exchanging gifts, sending greeting cards with messages of love and friendship, and supplying the less fortunate with food and clothing.

When we think of what God gave the world and why He gave it on the first Christmas, we must admit that no human choir was adequate to sing praise to God. There should have been angels whose voices were sweeter than man's. The content of their song was an understatement: "Glory to God in the highest."

III

The angels now turn toward earth and sing a promise to mankind. Because of what God had done for man, there was the possibility of peace among men. They continued: "And on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased."

If we could be assured that there would be no more war, we instinctively and spontaneously would rejoice with the angels. If there is one thing we want, it is peace. Our longing is expressed in the 1st and 2nd class mail cancellation mark used in our Post Offices: "Pray for Peace." That is the prayer of America. We have had so little of it. In 4000 years of world history, only approximately 268 years were spent in peace. Peace, peace, but there is no peace.

Peace is more than a longing. It is almost a demand. We know that there must be peace in the future because war is too expensive. Statisticians of the library of Congress estimate that World War II cost 40 million lives and 4 trillion dollars. What does this mean on a personal basis? It reduces itself to a $45,000 home and $56,000 cash for every family in the United States, Canada, Britain, Ireland, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, and Russia.

Moreover, we are beginning to realize that if there is another war it will be the very last, for war now means total annihilation of all. This morning's paper brings this close to home when a front page article advises us that the new Nike missile made in this city will carry atomic warheads. An atomic war will mean the end of all. And this is not mere words but the conclusion of our best and most informed scientists.

On this Christmas we listen to the message that the Prince of Peace was born and we hear again the message of angels, "Peace

n earth." If this is more than legend or entimental eye-wash, why has there not een peace on earth since Christ was born? is a good question, isn't it? In the King ames Version we read the words we know rom memory, "And on earth peace, good- ill toward men." This popularly means that od will give peace and good will to men. he Revised Standard Version corrects this npression by giving the actual meaning of ie original words: "And on earth peace mong men with whom he is pleased." eace to those with whom God is pleased. Vhat a difference! Now we can understand hy the world has not had peace.

Peace has a price. One aspect of the price to be well-pleasing to God. To be pleasing God means to be righteous, for the fruit righteousness is peace. To abide by God's mmands, to fulfill His will, to serve Him willing obedience is to please God. The -product is peace.

This may be applied to our various rela- onships. We all want peace of mind and ul, but there will be no peace unless we e conforming to God's will. If we are liv- g in sin, we can have no peace regardless how many books we read on the subject how many psychiatrists we see. When e are reconciled with God, we receive the ace that passes understanding.

Peace in our homes is our hearts' desire r Christmas. We want to be happy, at ace, and have a beautiful day. There may t be peace, however, in spite of many gifts d good food. If the husband and wife do t fulfill God's purposes of marriage, if ildren do not cheerfully obey their par- ts, if our hearts are going to be filled th jealousy or anger over gifts we re- ived or did not receive, there will be no ace in our homes. Peace results from the irit of love and goodness in the hearts of ery member of the family.

"Peace on earth" reminds us that there no peace among larger groups of men. ere is no peace tonight in Hungary or st Germany or Algeria, or Sumatra. There only a truce among the races in some coun- es, even our own. The principle applies re also. A world cannot have peace when defies the laws of God. Peace follows jus- e and law. Peace comes after brotherhood established. If one race considers itself perior to another and expresses it in dis- imination, there will be no internal peace a nation. If a world consists of have and ve-not nations, there will be no perma- nt peace. When men and nations respond God's love by living pleasing lives, peace earth will become a reality.

VI

The other price of peace is acceptance of Christ, the Saviour. Many erroneously think that peace is a human achievement. It is rather a gift of God. The Prince of Peace once brought this out. "My peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Here peace is explained as a gift of Christ.

We do not have peace in our world, because the world does not have Christ. It is not as Phillip Brooks once penned: "Everywhere, everywhere Christmas tonight." It is not Christmas everywhere tonight. In America this may be hard for us to realize. Millions of Communists do not even believe in God. Upon departing from a successful conference in Moscow, Kruschev remarked, "If there were a God, we could well thank him for this meeting." This very day more than a billion people do not have Christmas, do not know that the Saviour was born. Hundreds of millions of Hindus, Buddhists, and Mohammedans do not believe in or care about Christmas. In fact, two-thirds of the world is not celebrating Christmas with us. Is this not the key to the world's not having peace?

A price must be paid to have Christ who is the giver of peace. It is a price the world as yet does not want to pay. It means faith. It calls for repentance. It demands humility. In childlike fashion we must pray in the words of a hymn: "Come into my heart Lord Jesus, for there is room in my heart for Thee."

The angels' song of glory was so beautiful and wonderful that it deserved to be heard by all the world. Yet very few heard it. Caesar in Rome knew nothing about it. Herod in Jerusalem was unaware of it. The high priest, Annas, was probably asleep. Not even the people in Bethlehem heard the anthem. Only a few plain shepherds heard the glorious song. Why? Because they were in silence under the stars, because they were simple, plain, receptive people.

Will you hear the angels' song of glory? Perhaps you will be too busy to listen. There may be too much noise: shouts of glee in opening packages, loud greetings to seldom-seen friends, chattering excitedly over the hapepnings of the day. If this is true, then Christmas will soon pass away as just another holiday, and by Christmas night, you will say with relief, "I'm glad Christmas is over." But, if you are like the shepherds, quiet and receptive, simple and humble, you will be among the chosen few to hear the heavenly hosts sing: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

The Meaning of Christ's Coming

NORMAN HADDOCK, All Saints Church, Barry, Glam., South Wales

And the Word was made flesh — John 1:14

It is significant that the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel is appointed to be read as the Holy Gospel in the Eucharist on Christmas day, for in many ways St. John's Gospel is unique.

I

This Gospel recounts selected events covering only twenty days in the life of Christ. The author was more a pastor and evangelist than historian. He was concerned mainly that others might share the new life which he had already experienced. He testified that this life is made available to everyone through faith in Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and as the Son of God .

In all probability he wrote about 75 A.D. and was well acquainted with the Synoptic Gospels, Pauline Epistles and the Epistle to the Hebrews. From that vantage point he looked back and saw the incidents in the life of Christ as shadows not merely of things to come, but also of much that had already taken place in the early history of the church. The events which he selected are, therefore, more than historical incidents. They are proclaimed as symbols of divine purpose and providence. Thus for St. John, the cleansing of the temple and the feeding of the five thousand are more than mere historical episodes. They reveal the intention and purpose of God whereby the worship in the temple was superseded and replaced by a spiritual worship, "independent of place and requiring the sacrifice of self rather than of animals; yet a worship embodied in sacraments." The interviews with Nicodemum and the woman of Samaria are recorded for the same reason, and the miracle during the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee is mentioned because it suggests at the commencement of Christ's ministry the superiority of the new religion to the Jewish faith of the Old Testament.

However, like St. Paul, the fourth evangelist was well aware that Christ crucified was "to the Jews a stumblingblock and unto the Greeks foolishness." But he was equally convinced that in reality Christianity was "unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." He sees in Christ the meeting, fusion and consummation of the two great streams of Greek and Jewish culture and experience. Consequently, he proclaims Christianity as the universal religion and presents it in contemporary terms using language which he hoped would convince both Gentile and Jew. That is why he used the term "Logos," which we translate "word."

II

"Word" for the Jew meant God's agent in creation and redemption. In the beginning, "all things were made by him," and ultimately at the end they would be redeemed by him. So he was thought of as the eventual Messiah of Jewish expectation. For the Greek, "Word" meant the divine reason operating in philosophy, law and nature to give order, intelligence and purpose to the universe. Thus when St. John wrote, "the Word was made flesh," both Jew and Gentile would understand that he was claiming that Christ was the pre-existent divine creator who became incarnate to save man, and that Christianity was the final and absolute religion for Jew and Gentile alike.

So the Holy Gospel appointed for today answers the question, "What is Christianity?" in six words, "and the Word was made flesh." We remind the world that Christianity is the dogmatic assertion that God became man and dwelt among us.

We naturally ask, "Why did God become man?" God must have had a reason. Only man acts on impulse, for impulsiveness is characteristic of a divided and incoherent personality. Therefore what God does, He does deliberately. He became man to redeem and cleanse the world of sin, and from the moment of His birth His role as Saviour necessitated His death upon the Cross.

Christ's birth was heralded by the announcement to the shepherds, "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Christ came to be not merely the greatest man that ever lived—not merely the profoundest teacher that ever taught — not merely the finest exemplar of moral living that the world has ever seen. He was that, of course. But He came above all else to be the Saviour.

We need a Saviour; one who will strike at the root of our woe, and plant in our heart the principle of righteousness, so giving peace. Christ is that Saviour. Sin cursed the race and filled the world with shame, fear,

wretchedness and despair, until in the fullness of time, the Saviour appeared to purge the evil leaven, and pour into the veins of the race a new life, rich in power, health and blessing."

For the sake of humanity He was born. For the benefit of humanity He died. That is why we sing:

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to Heav'n,
Saved by His precious blood.

III

This doctrine of the Atonement has never been formulated into a rigid dogma comparable to that of the Trinity. Many theories have been suggested at different times, but the Church has never been committed to any particular theory. The Church has been content merely to state that through the death of Christ man was reconciled to God. How this was achieved remains a mystery, but the fact of the Atonement is the universal experience of Christians in every age.

We can unravel some of the mystery surrounding the reconciliation Christ won for us if we remember that Christ taught us to think of God in terms of fatherhood.

A father is always anxious to reinstate his erring son. Even when wronged, the father does not wait for the son to take the first step, lest the son should be hindered from doing so by an overwhelming sense of his own guilt. But the wise father realizes too that he must not minimize the wrong that has been committed. The son must be made to acknowledge the full meaning and extent of his sin. Thirdly, throughout the whole process of reconciliation the father takes care to preserve the feeling of mutual love whereby the son will respond so eagerly that the breach is healed for all times.

In much the same way did our Heavenly Father behave towards His erring children. God did not wait for sinful man to take the first step. The Atonement took place as a result of God's initiative. He acted first. And in giving His Son to die for us God showed that sin can never be treated lightly. The Cross is the eternal testimony of the heinousness of sin. Finally, the experience of Christians in every generation is that it is appreciation of what Christ endured for us on Calvary that defeats sin's power over men and enables them to re-enter into complete fellowship with God.

Today as we give thanks to God for the birth of His Son we remember why He was born. We remember therefore not only His life, but also His death. It is His death that gives meaning to His birth. And so on Christmas day we testify to the world, as St. John did, "And the Word was made flesh." Jesus is the Son of God who, "for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."

tory of Mysterious Simplicity

BILL G. WEST, First Baptist Church, Seagoville, Texas

Scripture Lesson: Luke 2:1-20

Truth is stranger than fiction. If a galaxy f all the famous fiction writers of history ere assigned the task of writing the story f Incarnation, their combined efforts could ot produce a story so magnificently mysrious and yet so startlingly simple as the ue account of it given by Luke in the beinning of his Gospel. Most of us have ard it dozens of times, and yet we never ase to delight in hearing it once again. he thing that seems to make this story of od's coming to earth as perpetually comelling is its unique wedding of mystery nd simplicity.

The Bethlehem story is one of mystery. here are at least six mysteries in this ory. Each of them is a characteristic mysry of God's ways with men. The first mysry is involved in the broad circumstances ut of which the story comes. Luke's account the birth of Jesus opens with a statement of the fact that in the days of John the Baptist Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken in all the realm he governed as emperor of the Roman Empire. Gaius Octavius was born in 44 B. C., was the great nephew of Julius Caesar. After winning acclaim as a military leader in the Roman legions, he was adopted by his uncle Julius as son and heir. When Julius Caesar died, he won his way to power and was finally given the throne of the Roman Empire and the title Augustus by the Roman Senate. He was the first emperor of the Roman Empire, and during his rule he issued many an important decree that altered the complexion of world affairs. By comparison, this decree to get a roll of the royal empire was insignificant. It was simply a means to more efficient administration and more effective taxation. But in God's own mysterious way He used the out-

workings of this decree as the backdrop for making His entry to earth. It was with this seemingly incidental matter that God put the finishing touches on centuries of preparation for His appearance on the scene of human history. This is but one of the mysteries of God. God often uses some seemingly incidental event in the life of an individual or nation to work out His purposes. We can never know in what mysterious way God will take some insignificant happening in our lives to do just this.

Notice a second mystery, the personage. Were any one of us to have imagined how God would come, we would probably have conjured up a king or ruler to have played the lead in opening back the curtain of time to let the Creator step through. But when the hero of the real story appears in verse four, he is not a king and only very remotely related to one. As a matter of fact he is a common man, a carpenter from Nazareth, and there by his side is the heroine, not the incomparably beautiful qeuen we might have expected, but a queen of quite a different sort, with a beauty of a very different kind. Of all the people in history He could have chosen to play the role in this drama of Incarnation, God in His mysterious way and for His own reasons chose this devout and devoted couple. But God does that. In the subsequent, as in this initial manifestation of Himself, God has chosen the common people of this world to help Him. Could it not be that the humble nature of the personage in each case is further to magnify the glory of the message borne?

Another mystery is bound up in the plot. The plot of this story is that God came to earth through a virgin named Mary. Never would we have thought of birth as the way God would come. Satan was thinking as men were, and we would have been, when he tempted Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple. This was the mysterious way men were expecting the Mesiah to come. But he came in a totally different, but equally mysterious way. Though He came in the natural processes of life, the mystery of the ages was bound up in that birth, for the baby Mary held on her lap was no ordinary baby. As incredible as it may seem, this first-born son of Mary was the eternal God in form of a tiny ,soft babe! God — twenty inches long! God—in an eight-pound package. The fact that made it mysterious, a fact known only to an esoteric few and that by supernatural disclosure, was that this birth was the result of the merging of humanity and divinity.

How does God come? In essentially the same way as He came to Bethlehem. That is, in a way of His own making, at a time of His choosing, and in a manner profoundly simple to those who know Him and perplexingly incredible to those who do not.

The place to which God came is obviously a mystery. Luke's account seems to suggest that Joseph and Mary arrived at Bethlehem too late to secure lodging for the night in the inn. Because of this they had to spend the night in the stable where Mary gave birth to the son of promise. Are we to construe this as ill-timing on the part of God? It was not that the God of eternity misjudged the time by a few hours and was left out in the cold. God filled that inn! He intended to be born in a stable! Another of the mysterious ways of God, but could it not be that God wanted to make it crystal clear to the simplest minds that He dwells not in the gilded cathedrals but in places of lowliness with people of humility? God came to earth and went. He left two things eternally exalted: the cross on which He died and the manger to which he came.

A fifth mystery, the announcement. God has come! Blow the bugles! Tell the king! Shout it to the throngs! Not God. He told the shepherds. That is a strangely mysterious thing about God. Always when there has been good news to share with the peoples of earth, God has told men like shepherds and let them tell others.

Finally, the sign is a mystery. People said to Jesus, "Give us a sign." He already had, but they didn't recognize the signs He had given because they had preconceived notions about how God would reveal Himself. But there were those whose hearts were right who saw the signs and believed. John the Baptist was one. In prison he began to doubt, so he sent messengers to Jesus to ask, "Are you the one, or shall we expect another?" Jesus said to the emissaries of John, "Tell John the things you see me do." And for John this was enough.

God's angels said to the shepherds, "You will know you are at the right place when you find a little baby wrapped in swaddling clothes." How completely out of proportion with the spectacle of the announcement! Heavenly light was shining and heavenly voices were singing, and yet a sign like this. But that is the way God does business. When He wants to show His power, he doesn't knock the top off a mountain or rip a hole in the earth. He comes into the life of a weak person and through that life shows Himself to be the God omnipotent.

With all its mystery the Bethlehem story

s one of simplicity. A man named Joseph vas engaged to be married to a young wom- n named Mary. During this time an angel ppeared to Mary and told her that she was oing to give birth to a supernaturally con- eived baby who would be the Messiah. An ngel talked things over with Joseph too nd made things all right with him. The nonths passed and the time came, and Mary ore her baby, just as it had been disclosed, n Bethlehem one very starry night. When he blessed event transpired, angels an- ounced it to some shepherds nearby and hey came "jumping fences," for that is vhat "made haste" literally means, to see he infant. Then they went forth in won- der and told others, and the story has been told ever since.

And so it has ever been. The story of God's dealings with man is a simple one. The story of salvation is easy enough for anyone to understand. God sent His son to earth. He lived a short life and died on a cross to save men from sin. They buried Him, but He arose from the grave and as- cended to heaven, and all who believe on Him are saved.

This is the mysteriously simple Bethle- hem story. Would you let belief in its au- thenticity lead you to a belief in its Author that He might come, as He did to the low- ly manger, to dwell in your heart?

Wise Men Seek Jesus

EDWARD W. STIMSON, Dundee Presbyterian Church, Omaha, Nebraska

Wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him."
—Matthew 2:1-2

n Swaying camels o'er the desert sands,
The Wise Men journey through the star- lit night
o seek a King they traverse many lands
And find a manger cradling mankind's light.

The Christmas story makes better poetry han prose. Almost anyone can write verse nder its spell. Each Christmas we are ransported in fancy back nearly two thou- and years to the oriental setting in which ur Saviour was born. Age after age the earts of Christians have been enriched by his story. Little wonder that their imagina- ions have colored it with ever new details, illing in where the simple Bible narrative is ilent. Gaspar, Melchior and Balthasar are he names tradition gives them. In the Eu- ope of the Dark Ages, when the wisdom f the East was largely forgotten, these Vise Men became great Kings, attended by orgeous trains and bearing the wealth of ingdoms to lay at the feet of the Christ- hild. Magi were beyond the ken of com- on European peasants, but popular imag- ation could picture wealthy Kings! Be- ause there were three gifts mentioned in he Scriptures, there must have been three ings, of them, though the Scripture does ot tell their number. So three Kings they ecame, in an age when wisdom was little rized, and we sing still in terms of the Me- ieval tradition:

We three Kings of Orient are,
Bearing gifts we traverse afar,
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star.

In some variants of the folk tradition the story was even more grossly twisted. When I visited Cologne on the Rhine I heard of it in the form of a legend of the three Kings of Cologne, who took gifts to the Christ- child in Bethlehem. Behind this legend was the bringing of the supposed bones of the magi to Cologne in the Twelfth Century. There in the Cathedral you may see the relics to this day, down in the basement crypt.

But all this tradition has missed the real point of the whole story. They were not Kings but scholars, wise-men, Magi. The Greek term is "Magoi." There were the learned priests of the great religion of Zo- roaster. Henry Van Dyke's beautiful story, *The Other Wise Man,* quickened my imagi- nation and interest in them years ago. They worshipped according to the traditions of the Medes and Persians which had been brought by King Cyrus to Babylonia when he conquered that land. Greatly learned in Astronomy, practicing the art of divination from the stars, these Magoi were reputed for their great wisdom throughout the an- cient world.

The Zoroastrian religion is the loftiest of the world's religions outside the Bible faith. The Bible nowhere condemns or criticizes this religion as it does idolatrous and su- perstitious faiths. The Jews learned much from this faith when they were in Exile in Babylon, and the Pharisees and common people of later Judaism kept some of its beliefs. In fact, at one time, when King

Cyrus let the Jews return to Jerusalem from Babylon and rebuild their Temple, some even wondered whether God had sent Cyrus to save his people, and in the writings of the great Prophet of the Exile, whom we call Second Isaiah, the Persian King is called by God "My Shepherd."

The Persian prophet, Zoroaster, or Zarathustra, lived 600 years before the Magi came to Bethlehem. He was a contemporary of Jeremiah, of Confucius in China, of Gautama the Buddha in India, and of Lao-Tse, living during that wonderful century of religious stirring from 650 to 550 B.C.

Zoroaster taught a highly ethical faith. The Supreme Being, he said, is so pure and so exacting in his demands of righteousness that he is best symbolized by light and fire. His wisdom is revealed in His creation, particularly in the lights of the heavenly bodies. So his priests became students of the stars, the great astronomers and astrologers of the ancient world. That is why the Magi saw the star in the East and came to Bethlehem.

Having thus identified the Magi as priests of Zoroastrianism, a whole new world of religious interest is open for us to explore. For we know a great deal about the Zoroastrian religion, through their modern descendants, the Parsees of India, who live in the neighborhood of Bombay, and through their ancient Scriptures, called the Avesta. By studying their faith and scriptures we can learn the motives which led the Wise Men to journey to Bethlehem. In so doing we may learn why wise men still seek Jesus.

I

Reading the Avesta, we discover first that Wise Men of this faith would seek the newborn Savior because they sought the highest truth of God. They believed in a God who reveals to men, and were eager to share in His newest, highest revelation.

Their name for God was Ahura Mazda, meaning "The Lord of Wisdom." His name is well known to us in the trade name of Mazda lamps. As God of light and truth he was worshipped symbolically in the sun and stars. On his altars the sacred fire was kept perpetually burning. The Zoroastrians worshipped Him as the all-knowing Creator, the Father of Justice and Right, the most bountiful spiritual source of all blessings and all good.

Believing in such a God and that life at its best would learn His truth, the Magi were eager to heed the star, and made their long journey over the desert sands to seek the Babe who would reveal the higher truth of God. They knew that their knowledge of the stars pointed to a higher truth beyond!

Wise men seek Jesus today for the same reason. The greatest of our scientists have faith in God and are eager to share in his highest revelation. To be sure there are some still who think they are wise, some even with learned degrees, who would try to defend a mechanical or material explanation of the universe. But they are becoming back numbers, behind the times. Astronomers, physicists and biologists, like Eddington, Millikan, and LeComte duNouy, have been led by their explorations of the fields of the most basic sciences to become men of faith. One summer, some years ago, I heard Dr. Arthur Holley Compton, who later became Chancellor of Washington University, lecture on his speciality, cosmic rays. He said at the conclusion of his lecture, "Our observation of the cosmic rays leads us to believe that the Universe began with a great act of Creation."

Truly wise scientists today know that the facts and knowledge of their sciences still point beyond. There are truths of God which cannot be confined to physical facts of stars, cosmic rays or test-tubes. All point to a higher intelligence, and his highest self-expression must be of the spiritual order. Ever since the Magi came, wise men have found this supreme, personal self-revelation of God in Jesus.

II

Again, as we read the Avesta, we realize that the Magi journeyed in search of Jesus because they knew the need for divine help in the battle for good against evil, and were looking for a Saviour.

The most characteristic feature of the religion of Zoroaster was its emphasis upon the irreconcilable conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, both in heaven and on earth. Zoroaster taught that there is a personal spirit of Evil, called Ahriman or Aingra Mainyu, who in the beginning chose evil for his portion and rebelled against Ahura Mazda, the Lord of Wisdom. This is the original source of the idea of fallen angels, which became the theme of John Milton's great epic poem, "Paradise Lost." In the Avesta, Ahriman with his legions of devils, called daeva, is always at war with the good angel hosts of Ahura Mazda. By ethical or unethical conduct men upon earth take sides in this cosmic conflict, which shall not cease until the end of time. Then the hosts of light will overcome and vanquish the powers of darkness through a

heaven-sent Saviour, and Ahura Mazda will judge the world in righteousness sending the righteous to the place of "the glorious heritage of good thoughts," while the wicked will be sent to "the abode of darkness, foul food and woeful words."

Thus says the Avesta:

O ye mortals, mark these commandments,
Which the Wise Lord has given,
For happiness and for pain:
Long punishment to the evil-doer,
Bliss for the follower of truth,
Joy of salvation ever afterwards for the righteous,
O Wise Lord! Thou most beneficent of beings!
In Thy Grace and through Thy will may we be powerful,
Mayest Thou lay hold on us, to help with salvation."

This help, Zoroaster taught, would come from God through a saviour. The Avesta calls him the "Soshyant." The Magi knew that the Hebrews had a similar hope, for the Jews had lived among the Zoroastrians in their Babylonian exile and a number of them continued to live there after the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Not thinking of Ahura Mazda as a national God, but recognizing his cosmic rule over the whole world, they had no difficulty identifying their Soshyant with the Jewish Messiah. Hence, in seeking the newborn Savior in Bethlehem the Wise Men were seking God's haven-sent victor over sin and evil, aware that the battle with sin and evil is too much for unaided human wills.

Wise men seek Jesus today for the same reason. The battle between good and evil, though the major victory has been won on Calvary, still goes on in this world, in the social order of history and in human hearts. Whether or not we prefer to pictorialize it in the terms of warfare between angels and demons, and whether or not we may have improved upon the Zoroastrian ideas of heaven and hell, we realize, if we are wise, the crucial importance of the battle for our own lives.

In times of easy-going prosperity and peace there has been a tendency to minimize the reality of warfare and to think that man needs no help from on high. But who today will say so? The evil threat of war raises its head still in ever more frightful mein. At this Christmas time humanity still needs the song of "Peace on Earth." Still there are peoples on earth oppressed and poor who would be glad like the shepherds of old to receive Him who brought "good tidings to the poor, release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind," and who came "to set at liberty them that are bruised." Selfishness and sin still rule in too many hearts, and we need a Saviour who can change human nature, and make men loving and unselfish by His vicariously suffering love. Still, if we are wise, we must seek the Saviour of the world.

III

Finally, the Magi sought Jesus of old, because with true wisdom they were humble and yearned to worship the Highest.

We read in the Scripture account that when the Wise Men came to Bethlehem they did not boast of their wisdom, which had led them to their discovery, nor did they hesitate to give their gifts when they found the Babe in humble circumstances.

"They rejoiced with exceeding great joy . . . and they came into the house, and saw the young child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him."

Truly wise men know the need of such worship today. They realize the humility which the mind and soul must feel before the truth. Actually, as human knowledge has expanded, and extended the circumference of the known, those who know most have been able to appreciate how much more there is still beyond, which we do not yet know, and how much more that we shall never know. The limits of human knowledge lead rightfully to a humble and worshipful spirit. Wise men realize the need then, of stretching their souls in aspiration in the presence of Him who forever excells us all. They know that worship is the food that is needed for the growth of the soul. So, as the Christmas season approaches, and regularly at all seasons, wise men repair in spirit to the One who was born a Babe in Bethlehem, to worship and adore.

The Magi rejoiced at Bethlehem, for beyond the expectations of their Zoroastrian faith, their minds and wills and hearts were satisfied. And we at Christmas time still find our minds illumined by the light of God's higher revelation, our wills renewed by His saving grace, and our hearts made sensitive and tender to bow down and worship Him.

Star-Guided Lives

LOWELL M. ATKINSON, First Methodist Church, Englewood, New Jersey

This is the season of the year when we think of the Epiphany, that is, the manifestation or showing forth of Christ to the world as evidenced by the appearance of the great star that drew the Gentiles to the manger in Bethlehem. And it suggests so much to our minds about the way in which God can guide and lead us into ways of light and truth. One hardly needs to preach a sermon about a beautiful story like this, but simply to suggest some lines along which our minds might move.

A great Roman general in writing in his journal an account of a victory in the west of Europe summed it up in the epigrammatic phrase: "I came, I saw, I conquered." you might say of the Wise Men—"they saw, they came, they were conquered." These were men of vision who from afar saw a star in the sky which to them was like a beckoning hope, and they followed that star to their destination.

I

However, the story is much richer than just that. These men of vision were men who were seeing in terms of the things that they had studied and understood. They were men who studied astrology, and to astrologers there came a star. God speaks to any person in accordance with what he studies and what he thinks about and what he knows, and He will place the equivalent of the star in the sky of any life. If you will follow intelligently the best that you know, you will find the road that leads to Jesus Christ.

Because the church believes that, we have Student Recognition Day. We encourage young people to go to college. We ask everybody to use his mind to the full. We have nothing to be afraid of, nothing to hide, and we know that the more intelligent that we are, the more we will find unfolded of the truth that lives forever in the character of God. And so we invite our young people to live lives of vision, to follow the best that they can glimpse or know until at last they see the fullness of truth in Him who came into this world and said, "I am the Truth." Now in order for us to see a star in the sky, there must be enthusiasm for the best in our experience. You see a star in the sky because, first of all, you have a star in your heart. You have an eagerness in your spirit. What we would like to do is to quicken our people so that they will eagerly pursue the best that they know and eagerly give themselves to the highest that they do understand.

II

Now while it is true that stars can guide and by them we can chart our way, even on the ocean and in the great uncharted places of earth, it is also true that something more than star-gazing is necessary to an effective and practical life. You not only must see; you must also do something about it. You must move.

The Wise Men came. So the story begins. These are men in action. If you want to know what a person is really like and what he is about in life, watch him in action. What a person does will sound so loudly that what he professes will become almost irrelevant. Watch a person in action and then you will know what he is. We act by the things that we really believe in, and not just by the things we profess to believe in. So it is significant not only to see a star but to follow it, to live by it.

Our world is suffering from a terrible schizophrenic condition, a divided self, professing to enjoy and admire a star which has no relation to actual conduct, so that we profess one thing and live by something else. This, of course, is enough to make the world sick at heart. It is the kind of thing that tears a person apart, this professing to believe one thing and living by some other standard. Now what we have got to do then is to make our action conform to the best that we know and to follow the star when we see it.

The Wise Men that came from the Mesopotamia Valley had no easy journey to make. They came in spite of distance, desert, and danger. They came with determination. They acted as they believed. Wise men, now, as then, live by the best that they see.

Now there is a particular twist to this story that always has fascinated me. When the story begins, it begins in the middle, and you find that while these men have followed the star and have acted upon their faith, they have come to the wrong place. This is how the story begins. These men, with the best of intentions and with the most eager resolve to follow the star, have come —of all places—into the court of Herod the Great. Well, it is just like one of these fairy tales where an innocent little wanderer in the woods follows the beguiling enticements of a witch in disguise, and you are horri-

fied as she walks into the house where the witch has her in complete control. You say, "In just a moment now the witch will unmask and throw the child in the furnace or something, and this is horrible." Herod the Great was the one person who should not have been told anything about the birthday of a king. When Herod heard the news from the Wise Men that there had been born a king, immediately his cunning and crafty mind went to work. Fortunately for history, his mind was so cunning and so crafty that he over-reached himself. He pretended that he would come to worship, if they would just let him know where this king was.

III

This dramatic, critical situation reminds us that the ways of pilgrimage are not always straight or easy or simple or clear. They are strangely complicated, and while we act sometimes on excellent intentions we find ourselves in terrific predicaments. Then what are you going to say? Some people say: "The star has ceased to guide. I trusted God and look what happened to me. Something is the matter with God." Other people will take a saner view and will say: "Throughout all the complexity of this experience I shall trust the leading of God who knows best and who is the best. Loyalty to Him is more important than anything that can happen to me."

The choice as to which way you are going to think and which way you are going to go is up to you. You can take the road of resentment and bitterness and disenchantment and make yourself wretched and miserable, if you wish, and I call that the way of unwisdom. But the way of the Wise Men, then and now, is to believe and to trust, and when things go wrong, still to believe and to trust.

The Wise Men emerged from that situation. They were still in great peril, but they went their way rejoicing because the star was still there! The guidance was still there, because God was still there! And that can be true of your life and mine, too.

They followed their Star of Hope to Bethlehem, and there they were conquered by this little baby. (And who is not?) They worshipped with their adoration. They expressed it with costly gifts. We should all do that sometimes—worship with *costly* gifts. David said, "I will not give unto my God that which hath cost me nothing." If you go through life giving God what is left over, after you have done everything else you can think of with your money first, you will never enter into the real meaning of worship nor will you understand what life is all about. But if you know what it means to give that which costs you something to your God, then you will find glowing in your hearts a warmth and a joy that are God's blessings to those who really love Him and give to Him. The Wise Men gave their costly gifts to show forth their love and to show that they were conquered by this infant king.

They might have been supercilious and said, "We do not believe it possible for this little baby in a manger to be the real goal of our quest; this cannot be journey's end—this little baby in a cave." They could have taken that attitude. It would have been a very plausible attitude. Perhaps we would have said something like that. The Wise Men showed their wisdom in nothing so much as this, that in these humble and small beginnings, they were able to see the touch of God! And if we can properly respect the quiet, simple things of this life, which have such seminal power to live and to grow for the good of God's kingdom, then we shall have begun to enter into some of the deeper ranges of wisdom.

The Star of Knowledge leads to Christ! I would like to think of that star as over our homes; I would like to think of it as over our colleges; I would like to think of it, always, as over the church. Let us in our own way covet this higher wisdom, the wisdom of loving the highest, the wisdom of following the highest, the wisdom of surrender to the highest when we find it in Jesus Christ. Let us live Star-Guided lives, unafraid and unabashed, for there is no more practical wisdom than this. And may God bless us as we continue on this upward way in His strength.

All I Want for Christmas

WESLEY P. FORD, Central Christian Church, Pasadena, California

For some Christmas has become a rather dull, monotonous, and even boring show. Many are glad when it is over. I think of at least three reasons why this is true. One is that we have lost sight of the full significance of this great event. What ought to be a day of reverence has become for many only a day of revelry. This day set apart by the early church because of its awe inspiring wonder has been buried un-

der the debris of trivialities. Most come to Christmas now not anticipating the joy of the celebration of the birth of a Savior but rather to live through a passing show colored with last year's decorations and made more annoying by larger crowds and more traffic jams.

I read of a busy college professor who sat absorbed in a book in the waiting room of the hospital while his child was being born. At least for a little while, he could read without the interruption of students. Excitedly the nurse came to the door to exclaim, "It's a boy!" Conditioned by many student interruptions, the professor replied, "Ask him what he wants." As we come to Christmas, have we forgotten why we are here?

The second reason for the shallowness of the show is that under the trivial commercial pageantry we have lost sight of the principal character. A mother and her son stood watching a Christmas parade. When the bands, the floats, the clowns, and Santa had passed, the boy looked to his mother and asked, "Where was Jesus?"

And the third reason why Christmas has been dulled is that we have made its observance self-centered. The chief question seems to be, what do you want for Christmas? At the heart of the observance of the anniversary of God's greatest gift to mankind, we have put a self-centered show. Paul might have been speaking about our celebration when he said, "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images."

I

In the coming of the Christ Child to live in history, God's gift came in answer to man's deepest need and most serious hunger. Most needed was insight, knowledge concerning the character of God, and the nature of the laws of His universe. Added to insight, man needed courage and faith. These came to earth through Jesus Christ. To celebrate aright this event ought to be to share in an experience that would make us more aware of those basic insights which do speak to our greatest needs. But this is the area in which our modern Christmas is most abused. God sent His gift to meet our basic needs. But we have multiplied our wants until they are unrelated to our needs. By this abuse it is possible to tie a hundred gifts to another's Christmas tree while ignoring his needs. Wants as God understands them are related to needs.

What do you suppose the shepherd psalmist of centuries ago would have answered if one had said, "This is Christmas. What do you want?" Actually, you see, he would have been hard put for an answer, for he had such a faith in God that he was already saying, "I shall not want." But the paslmist still needed and knew he needed the hope of a Messiah.

When the poet said, "God, our maker, doth provide for our wants to be supplied," he was not speaking of lollipops and toy airplanes, and hot-rods and popguns; he was speaking rather of the gifts of God that make for life, that undergird our days with peace and with joy. And so we ought to ask whether our Christmas wants are basically those about which the psalmist spoke; those which are answered in God's Christmas gift, or whether they are out of the sea of trivialities which surround us as we desire to keep up with the Joneses.

One evidence of the error in our observance of Christmas is seen in a guiding principle in our shopping. How many times have you said as you were selecting gifts, "I want to find something that he does not already have." In some parts of the world that would not be difficult, but for us, it poses a problem. We are buying things for those already surfeited in things. Actually, we have been hard pressed in the church to discover families who are in need of Christmas baskets. Our people have things! They have canned goods and meat. But this is not to say that the needs of our people are met. They are not! Even when our pantry shelves are loaded, we are hungry! Men are as starved for the guidance, the faith and the courage which Christ came on earth to bring as they were on that night in Bethlehem. We are led, therefore, to the responsibility of learning to give that which serves man's basic needs, not simply that which one thinks he wants.

II

In the light of this background, consider our wants. We remember the song in which the boy says, "All I want for Christmas is my two front teeth." If these front teeth were missing, then this want was related to a need. And we hope for him that his wish was granted. Real wants and real desires are born in physical needs. And one of the responsibilities of the Christian Church is to be concerned that these needs are met. Such is the glorious and thrilling ministry of Dr. John Ross in Africa. Through his life, made possible by our missionary giving, the gift of health is given to hundreds. If you saw Dr. Ross on TV, you will recall some of these to whom he ministers. Remember the boy who was carried into the hospital be-

ause of his badly deformed leg. And then he excitement with which he learned first o stand up, and then to walk with the aid f a crutch. That boy found all he wanted or Christmas!

By the Pool of Bethesda, Jesus met a man vho had been ill for thirty years. In answer to Jesus' question, "Do you want to be ealed," the sick man answered, "Sir, I ave no one to put me into the pool!' And here are millions in the world today who ave not one to put them into the pool of ealth-giving and life-giving waters. All hey want for Christmas is the lift that we an supply.

And we must not forget that some will ever again have the gift of health as we now it. A good woman who will never gain know normal health said in my presnce, "If I could only walk." For her the bility to walk would be the greatest gift n earth. All I want for Christmas!

And I know what some others want. A few ears ago in Sacramento I witnessed a fight etween two parents. It was one of the most aunting experiences I have ever beheld. On he sidewalk in front of thir house the ather and mother fought over possession f a child about four years old. They cursed, natched and grabbed. As the blows ceased he child, through tears, sobbed, "Let's not ight any more." That is not an isolated xperience and there are thousands of chilren in our gilded cities who, if asked what hey most wanted for Christmas, would rely, "That mother and daddy love each ther." Christmas came when God so loved hat He gave. And all our gifts, including .V.'s and sport cars, cannot atone for ne absence of love. All I want for Christias? Love.

And I know what some others want. I nce baptized a boy about twelve years old, vhose family I did not know. I suggested hat I go to his home and talk over with im the matter of his becoming a Christian. ut he said no, he would come to the hurch. It was some time before I learned ne reason for his reluctance to have me ome to his home. He was proud and did ot want me to know that his mother was n alcoholic. And I remember this boy, and know other children and young persons who, asked what they really wanted most for hristmas, would reply, "A sober father," r "A sober mother." Go ahead with neckes and socks and earrings, these may be ood gifts. But let no one mistake these for od's gift of righteousness and love. Some ave real wants!

There is another need which most of us share. Just now when we seem to have the most—the greatest abundance—we also experience a shallowness and emptiness in our lives. "How do I find that which satisfies the gnawing hunger in life?" one asks. A psychologist has said that we spend the first half of our years afraid of life, and the second half afraid of death. Jesus asked, "Who, by being anxious, can add one cubit to his stature?" It is a good question, but in spite of it, we keep on being anxious. Asked what they really wanted for Christmas, hundreds would reply, "Faith and courage to live radiantly and triumphantly now." Our need is for joy in the midst of abundance. This is what the disciples wanted when, in their anxiousness, they watched the calm courage of Jesus, and discovering his secret said, "Lord, teach us to pray." All I want for Christmas.

III

So if we really want to take Christmas baskets it behooves us to be certain that they are filled with Christmas content. Let us therefore give good gifts, for it is in the giving of the good gift that we first became aware of Christmas. "Love came down at Chrstmas." God so loved that he gave, and Jesus kept on loving and kept on giving until he had given all that any person can give. I doubt if Jesus ever gave another a necktie or a pair of socks, but he gave to hundreds the gift of life: love, faith, sobriety, peace, courage, and strength for the journey. These are the real gifts. And we cannot share historically in the observance of Christmas unless we share in its giving. Actually, the program of the church and the whole effort of the kingdom of God ought to leap ahead at Christmas time as men pour out of their abundance good gifts for the King, as the King poured out of his abundance the good gift of life for us all.

A composer sat in the audience and listened to an amateur violinist fumble through one of his compositions. When the novice had finished the composer walked to the front, took the violin and rendered in all of its beauty the dream that he had composed. Finishing, he said quietly, "That is what I intended." So God would speak to us as he watches our Christmas. He is the composer. He took the initiative and poured forth into our world at Bethlehem, and across the plains and hills—purity, beauty, love and power.

God has given us the good gift, the gift of life and knowledge of the way. Do we, therefore, know how to give good gifts to them that ask? This is no time for a dull

show, but rather for exciting adventure! For in the gospel of Jesus Christ which is still the good news, we have a basket filled to overflowing for those who, out of need say, "All I want for Christmas."

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BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHING

(Continued from page 2)

thor's manner is congenial and persuasive, and his book is crammed with substantial homiletical materials. (Abingdon, 125 pp., $2.)

Why Go to Church? by Truman B. Douglass is an exciting, compelling book that gives new perspectives to our understanding of the nature, work and significance of the church. Written especially for the non-church member and the nominal member, the book also offers a thorough and competent appraisal which both heartens and inspires. (Harper, 118 pp., $2.)

The Thundering Scot by Geddes MacGregor is a sympathetic portrait of John Knox, and is further evidence of the appreciative approach of modern writers to the distinguished figures in church history who have hitherto been either neglected or grossly caricatured. That this is a popular biography does not mean that the author has avoided the posture of scholarly habit; it means that here is a vividly written account which will stir the imagination and heart as the reader sees life, as it were, through the eyes of the venerable Scotsman of old. (Westminster, 240 pp., $3.95.)

An Introduction to the Apocrypha by Bruce M. Metzger has been published simultaneously with the RSV Apocrypha, and as such is a valuable companion volume. Each of the books of the Apocrypha is discussed in terms of origins and content, and the author interprets the values of these writings as a link between the Testaments. The book concludes with an account of the Apocrypha and the church, and the varied influences of these writings in Christian literature and art. (Oxford, 274 pp., $4.)

Floyd V. Filson, who with Dr. Metzger served on the committee which prepared the RSV Apocrypha, also discusses the Apocrypha in *Which Books Belong in the Bible?* But his thought includes the whole canon and asks questions such as: Is the Old Testament Christian Scripture? Is the Apostolic Witness Basic? Is Tradition Subject to Scripture? This provocative study deserves the attention of all Bible interpreters. (Westminster, 174 pp., $3.)

Progress Against Prejudice is a human and friendly approach to a heated and disturbing fact. The author, a professor of journalism at Syracuse University, has traveled widely and thought deeply. As a Christian, he addresses himself to those who also believe that the races can live amicably in one world. That progress has and is being made in the churches and in the nation is evident, but the Christian's behavior, both in and out of church, warrants both the prodding and guidance which the author gives. (Friendship, 165 pp., $2.50.)

Improve Your Church Bulletins, edited by Webb B. Garrison, contains an abundance of materials designed to vitalize church parish papers. Sentence sermons, pungent proverbs, stories, anecdotes and the like, are included in this well-indexed book that will surely be as useful in sermon preparation as for bulletins. (Revell, 127 pp., $1.95.)

Worth Quoting

E. PAUL HOVEY, The Federated Churches, Lewiston, Idaho

The Christian religion says that the pain f suffering can be translated into some- ning greater if we believe that God can se us and is using us, no matter how in- apacitated we may seem to be, to work out is plan. Perhaps we cannot see the way which God is using our suffering, but henever love or faith transforms our suf- ering into sacrifice, then God is at work us.

An illustration of this is in the story of ydia, the blind flower girl in Bulwer Lyt- n's "Last Days of Pompeii." Nydia moves rough the story a sad and pitiful figure, roping her way unerringly about the wind- g streets of Pompeii. When Vesuvius uries the city in molten lava, all is in tal darkness and the terror-stricken in- abitants rush frantically to and fro in an fort to escape, but lose themselves in the wful darkness. But Nydia, accustomed as e is to the dark, moves swiftly through e streets and rescues the one she loves. only we could know for what our crosses ay be unconsciously fitting us. God may e at work in us through our suffering.

—Paul Simpson McElroy in *Wings of Recovery* (Revell)

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The Thanksgiving proclamations of the merican presidents for the last two dec- les have increasingly departed from the iginal rather purely religious spirit of hanksgiving, and they have increasingly come congratulations to God for having ch very wonderful children in America.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

* * *

We must still claim that Christianity en- bles us to "make sense" of the world, not eaning that we can show that it is sense, t with the more literal and radical mean- g of making into sense what, till it is ansformed, is largely nonsense — a dis- dered chaos waiting to be reduced to or- r as the Spirit of God gives it shape. Our oblem is to envisage the task of the hurch in a largely alien world.

—William Temple

* * *

No two people can live together in any uman relationship outside the realm of re- gion. Husband and wife, parent and child, mrades-in-arms, employer and workman, acher and learner, seller and buyer, judge d defendant, all are living in religion's field. Even the vocabulary those relation- ships force on mankind is the vocabulary of religion, and the relationship involved can continue only by the constant use of such religious words as confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and atonement. Nor can any human relationship be broken except by the use of religious terms: tres- pass, infidelity, wrath and pride, usury and lust. And even when death causes severance, the terms then used are purely religious, indeed; there is no other field within which we can express ourselves, for even doubt, atheism, and nihilism are religious terms.

—Carlyle Marney in *Faith in Conflict* (Abingdon)

* * *

Jesus never said, "God loves man." He proclaimed, "God is love." And it is on the cross that the theory is clothed with the splendor of the act. He never said, "I will show you the light." He insisted, "I am the light." And the light that burst from the empty tomb has penetrated the darkness for all time. Nor did he say, "This is the way." His claim was always, "I am the way." And that way necessarily crosses Calvary without any comfortable detours, and the shadow of two crossed beams falls athwart the road for the man who is going His way. But during His short career there was less theory than action always. Christ spent very little time explaining to the skep- tics the workings of divine power. Instead He healed the sick and raised the dead. In this sense He was the great ascetic, in other words the great practicer of ideals, the ul- timate doer, the incomparable liver.

—Leonidas Contos

* * *

When the Church is true to her Lord, nothing, not even "the gates of hell," can prevail against her. But when her life ceases to be relevant to the life of the times, when the faithful lose faith and remain believers only, when the essence is lost and only the substance remains — in short when the Church ceases to be apologetic in the clas- sical sense of the word, and becomes apolo- getic in the modern sense — then the judg- ment of God will surely come upon her.

But let us bring the matter down to per- sonal terms. The man who knows little about his faith, even though he feel devoted to his church, will be inclined despite himself to apologize for it, in the contemporary sense, that is make excuses for it. A man can say,

"I believe in Christ and I love my Lord." But unless Christ's claim has had a personal significance to him, that love is not so deeply rooted that it can produce, in crisis, the courage and the forthrightness and the conviction of the true apologist. For to fight the good fight, involves action as well as propaganda. What we teach will mean little if the testimony is not borne out in our lives.—Leonidas Contos.

* * *

There are many persons ready to do what is right because in their hearts they know it is right. But they hesitate, waiting for the other fellow to make the first move — and he, in turn, waits for you. The minute a person whose word means a great deal dares to take the open-hearted and courageous way, many others follow. Not everyone can be turned aside from meanness and hatred, but the great majority of Americans is heading in that direction. I have a great belief in the future of my people and my country.
—Marian Anderson in *My Lord, What a Morning*

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Independence is a fine virtue. But, like many another virtue, when pushed too far it becomes a vice. It is wise to be cautious, but caution can easily degenerate into cowardice . . . so, while independence is good, if pushed too far it results in disaster.

This is true in the state. During the days of the Judges personal liberty seems to have reached its climax. The author of the book says "every man did what was right in his own eyes." Everybody learned complete independence. What a grand day in which to live! No, it was not grand at all. Such independence resulted in anarchy and a complete loss of freedom. The very roadways grew up because men no longer dared to travel them. When everybody in a state does just as he pleases, everybody becomes in a measure a slave . . . When husbands and wives become independent of each other, their marriage goes upon the rocks. When parents become independent of their children, they destroy them through their neglect . . . . What has blackened the reputation of the priest and the Levite? Not the fact that they joined the robbers in their attack upon a certain helpless traveler. They simply said of the wounded man, "He is none of my business . . . " But every man is my business. I am also the business of everyone else. We are bound up in a bundle of life with everyone. To seek merely to save my own life is surely to lose it . . . . Jesus was dependent upon God . . . he declared, "I can do nothing on my own authority." That gave him an independence so staggeringly magnificent that he stepped across the threshold of death declaring in spite of his seeming failure, "I have overcome the world.—Clovis G. Chappell in *Meet These Men* (Abingdon).

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The trouble with the church is that so many people have great convictions about little things.—Henry Knox Sherrill.

* * *

The greatest force for church unity is mission. There is the unity we seek. It was the passion of mission that brought unity to the infant church, which in its earliest days had to bridge the worst abyss the church ever met—the chasm between Jew and Greek . . . The only force that could do it was the welding power of mission—"Go ye . . . and make disciples of all nations."—Halford Luccock.

* * *

I wouldn't want any young athlete to think he could be more talented on the playing field just by attending church on Sunday. I do know that leading a full Christion life has made me a better man.
— Alvin Dark in "Why I Tithe"

* * *

A rancher was looking for someone to assist him in the affairs of his ranch. He interviewed a number of young men as likely candidates. His constant question was, "Can I trust you to look after my affairs?" He finally ran upon one boy who had this reply, "Please, sir, I can sleep on a windy night." This remark intrigued the rancher and he hired the young man. After several weeks he was completely satisfied with him, until one night it was very windy and a storm was blowing up. He went to awaken the young man to assist him in checking the affairs of the ranch, to cover the hay and put away tools. The young man could not be awakened so finally the man hobbled out over the ranch to do the job himself and to his joy and delight he discovered everything had been taken care of previously. Therefore the boy could sleep even in a wind without any fear of unfinished tasks.

* * *

Difficulties in Christian thinking about Christ have sprung from the effort to avoid any difficulty. That is to say, men have tried in various ways to construct some theory about Christ which will explain him to everyone's satisfaction. Whether Jesus is depicted as two parts man and one part God (as in one of the ancient heresies) or is regarded as a perfect man who shows us what God is like (as in some modern

hought), the aim is to solve the problem f what is meant by the Incarnation. It is etter . . . to admit that here we have a roblem which cannot be solved by any the- ry of ours. We are face to face with a mys- ery; and when we are confronted by a nystery, it is wise to recognize it as what t is . . . The mystery is Jesus Christ him- elf . . . But to say that . . . does not mean hat our thinking or our speaking about him as to cease . . . the way is open, to the end f time, to explore the mystery that is Christ Jesus.

* * *

The whole principle of merits and demer- ts, reward or punishment, is largely a per- ersion of Christ's philosophy. For he never ought out followers by holding out a prom- se of merit or the threat of scorn for those who found they could not make the com- mitment. He simply invited. And the reward n taking up the burden of the cross and following was, and is, initially at least, the exhilaration of walking in gracious com- pany.

Now modern Christians are sometimes of- fended by literal readings of this passage, mplying as they do the assumption of some kind of burden. Some find they contradict Jesus' invitation to the "heavy-laden." We forget, however, that Jesus promises to give rest, not to remove the load. We forget also that the spiritual successes in life are not necessarily those who walk lightly, but the ones that are well and stably grounded. This lesson came forcibly to the young man who had been apprenticed to a roofing contrac- tor. When he hesitated to go out on a high pitched roof with a light hooked ladder as his only support, the older man showed him how his weight on the ladder provided his own best security. I am sure you have seen that principle vindicated many times in the lives of people you have known.

—Leonidas Contos

* * *

Wright Morris, author of "The Inhabi- tants," has a little bit like this: "I can see it coming—a Law, making it illegal for a man to have a hard time." How do you like that? Sometimes it seems as if that's what the government's trying to do—keep every- body on easy street . . . So, pass a law mak- ing it illegal for a man to have a hard time . . . But then, Morris goes on to say: "If it ain't hard times makes a man, what is it? . . . If you are going to take troubles away from a man—be careful what you take . . . You may take away the man instead of the troubles." . . . Hear the Good Book talking: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion." . . . And whose is the kingdom of heaven? The first beatitude says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." Hard times a-comin'? Find something worth doing, with a hard- time label on it. Love it. Agonize over it. Give it all you have.—O. H. Austin in *Come As You Are* (Abingdon)

* * *

The more a man knows, the more he for- gives.

* * *

Religion should be our steering wheel— not our spare tire.—Charles L. Wheeler.

* * *

People are the bottleneck. The minds of men always have been searching for per- fect plans — ideal systems of government, smoothly running production programs, fool-proof peace machinery, equitable dis- tribution methods.

While many of the plans and programs look perfect on paper, they fail to take into consideration the people who must operate them. And the people are the bottleneck.

For untold centuries, human ignorance, hate, jealousy, selfishness, dishonesty, im- purity and other shortcomings have been undermining the most ideal systems that men's minds could devise.

Unfortunately, too many of us are un- willing to look to the basic answer—a direct attack on the shortcomings of men—when seeking to improve conditions on limited or worldwide fronts. We'd rather advance pa- per plans and propose sewer systems.

Zut if we're ever to eliminate the prob- lems of warfare, corruption, tyranny, slav- ery, irresponsibility—and all the rest, we'll have to deal drastically with the basic nature of men. And we'll have to do it on a scale greater than ever before.

Some answers have been in our hands almost 2,000 years, but we haven't had the courage to give them a thorough and wide- spread try.—*Nampa* (Idaho) *Free Press.*

* * *

The personal and social aspects of the Christian gospel necessarily involve each other. If the preacher starts to deal with an important social question, he finds him- self facing personal issues, for without transformed individuals no Christian social solution will ever work. And if he starts dealing with intimate personal problems, he finds himself confronting social situa- tions which powerfully and often disas- trously affect individuals.

—Harry Emerson Fosdick

* * *

If our learning succeeds only in making

us wealthy or famous, our studying has not been of the fullest benefit, but if it enables us to be of higher service to God and man it is worth all the years of effort it has cost us. One of life's greatest satisfactions is the feeling that we have helped another person in some way.—Ellsworth Kalas.

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THE MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS . . .

(Continued from page 2)

His spirit of love still has miraculous power to change and quicken the heart of all humanity.

Christ's earthly life ended on a cross. It was the way of suffering, shame and defeat. Yet, death could not stop the joyous, victorious spirit of Christ. What a miracle it is that Christmas has become a time of singing and of joy. It is the happiest celebration of all the year. The miracle of Christmas is its power to change our life to, once again, singing around a manger scene.

How could the cry of a Baby be heard above the jarring noise of life? We are interested in bigness, power, pomp, and splendor. Half of the world holds that a person is of little value outside of the value of the state. But, in the free world, personality is still sacred in the light of the teachings of this Christmas Child who grew into young manhood and, for three brief years in His teachings, stressed the importance and value of every life. Each soul was precious and of equal value in the love of God. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and, thus, life needs a saviour. But, through love, there is a redemptive way that means victory for every life. What a miracle that the teachings of Christ still live in spite of marching armies, broken dreams and deserted ideals! The miracle of Christmas can be found in a child-heart and the spirit of love and understanding.

So, let us, as we approach the Mass of the Christ, make of our hearts a humble place where once again the miracle of Christ's birth can be repeated in our own Christmas experience.

ROLLAND W. SCHLOERB
ARMIN C. OLDSEN
CHARLES L. SEASHOLES
GENE E. BARTLETT

he Hope of New Beginnings

ROLLAND W. SCHLOERB, Hyde Park Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois

And he who sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.
Revelation 21:5

These words from the Book of Revela-on suggest a thought that is especially tting at the beginning of a New Year. rossing the threshold into another year we ecome particularly aware of this truth, it it is equally pertinent for every day of ir lives. The truth that we have in mind that new beginnings are always possible.

The past is past. We cannot change it. ur attitude toward it might change, and ie sting of its memories might be drawn, it still we are compelled to say as did ilate, "What I have written, I have writ-en." But the future is not fixed. At least is is our faith. We do not need to be ushed into tomorrow by what we have been -we can be drawn by what we aim to be-me. New beginnings are possible.

I

Each new life born on the planet is a ew beginning. We call our children our young hopefuls." because we feel that in iem some new possibilities are present. In magazine article, a famous photographer, dward Steichen, tells about assembling a hotographic exhibit entitled, "The Family f Man." He and his co-workers examined bout 2,000,000 pictures and chose 503 hich best told the story of humanity round the world. They closed the collection ith what they thought was the perfect nal picture for the series. It was a photo-raph of a little boy and a little girl hand i hand, moving from the shadows into the unshine.

When asked why he thought this was a tting closing picture, he replied by quot-ig a remark from the poet, Robert Frost. reporter once asked Frost what he ought about life, and the poet replied, ermont-fashion, in just three words: "It oes on!"

Most of us do not need to be reminded iat life goes on apace. The years seem to ass by with ever increasing rapidity. But fe also has its new beginnings. Each new fe is a new hope.

II

A second kind of new beginning is espe-cially inspiring. This has happened in the lives of people whose world came toppling down around them, and who had to find strength to make a new beginning. They found indeed that God "makes all things new."

Those whose memory goes back to the days of the Great Depression know that many people lost their positions for one reason or another. Others had to go into bankruptcy. Some lost their homes. Each of us may know of people who had to begin all over again. One thinks of the countless refugees in the world today who have been thrust from their homes and who are faced with the need of beginning again.

Such new beginnings are not limited to times of national or international crisis. In-dividuals are confronted with the need of beginning again. In the spring of 1865, a young man had been graduated from Har-vard College, and in the autumn he took a position as a teacher in a Boston Latin School. This young teacher was Phillips Brooks. For a few months things went well, but then serious trouble began to set in, and he could write to a college friend that the class he was teaching was "the most disagreeable set of creatures without ex-ception I ever met with." He adds concern-ing himself: "I am tired, sick, cross, and almost dead."

In the winter he was asked to leave the school since he was unable to meet the re-quirements of a teacher. It was then a ca-tastrophe, final and humiliating. To have sought another similar position under the circumstances was hopeless. To add to his humiliation the headmaster told him as he was leaving that he had never known any one who failed as schoolmaster to succeed in any other calling.

That was the end of teaching for Phillips Brooks, but it was followed by a new begin-ning. After six months of heart-searching, he decided that he would study for the min-

istry. On the eve of his departure for the seminary he wrote these words: "As we pass from some experience to some experiment, from a tried to an untried scene of life, it is as when we turn to a new page in a book we have never read before, but whose author we know and love and trust to give us on every page words of counsel and purity and strengthening virtue."

No one can estimate what that new beginning meant for the world. Phillips Brooks became one of the great preachers of the nineteenth century — one to whose writings people still turn for inspiration and help. New beginnings are possible in individual lives when their world collapses around them.

III

There is an almost unbelievable hope in the truth of the possibility of new beginnings. That hope is that we do not have to remain as the people we are. We can make new beginnings in our individual lives. And the same hope applies to our corporate life. The world does not have to remain as it is. There is hope for the possibility of new beginnings.

This hope for a new beginning is not always obvious. From several sources we might feel that we cannot make any new beginnings. Our characters seem set. We are what we are by virtue of our past decisions. Our past controls us: so it seems!

Gordon Allport, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, has written a book entitled, *Becoming*. In it he tries to show in language that is not too simple for the layman, that our growth is determined by our future more than by our past. What we become is not completely determined by our future more than by our past. What we become is not completely determined by what we were, but by what we want to become. We are not simply pushed by circumstances from the past, we are pulled by goals of the future.

This hope of new beginnings is fanned into a bright flame when we see how lives were begun over again in the New Testament. Jesus had the power to inspire people to newness of life. They did not remain under the cloud of failure. At least some of them began anew and entered into a life of usefulness and power.

One of the familiar Christian symbols, found on some church steeples and on altars, is the figure of a crowing rooster—and it represents the cock that crowed at the time of Peter's denial of Christ. By itself, it might remind us only of human weakness that fails in the time of crisis.

No church would put the figure of this crowing rooster on its altars for that reason alone. The fact is that Peter made a new beginning. That beginning was preceded by his going out and weeping bitterly. Not only had he denied his Lord, but he felt that he merited his Lord's rejection of him. But we read that the Lord looked on Peter. In that look Peter must have found ground for hope, because later he was able to make a new beginning.

To use a phrase from Allport: "Life has a forward intention." What we are to be tomorrow is not entirely determined by what we were yesterday. It is determined by what we want to become as individuals and as communities.

We have the assurance that God is at work in us — a God who said through his prophet, "Behold I make all things new." To this we can add the assurance from Paul's experience. Speaking out of the experience of making an about-face in a new beginning, he writes: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

Christ Helps You Forget

ARMIN C. OLDSEN, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lakewood, Ohio

This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind.

Philippians 3:13

One of the most fascinating things to think about is time. Time is one of God's many wonderful gifts, given for man's benefit while he lives on earth. God does not live in time. To Him a day may be like a thousand years, or a thousand years may be like a day. Before creation there was no time, no days and years, no seconds and hours. When the world shall pass away, time will disappear with it. In eternity there will be no clocks and no calendars. God gives time to all at the same impartial rate. Whether they use it wisely or foolishly each receives sixty seconds to the minute, sixty minutes to the hour. None receives it faster; none slower. When the clock of my life will have moved forward five minutes or five years, yours will have moved exactly as far. Time is a gift that cannot be exchanged. You cannot give your neighbor of your time

ecause he can make better use of it today nan you can; nor will you be able to bor- ow time from him tomorrow. Time moves orward "silently like a fox over soft snow" nd only occasionally do we become aware f its movement, at a birthday perhaps or s we approach a new year.

Time as we know it in this world does ot last forever for the individual. The al- otted time of your life and mine grows horter with the passing of every minute. t has been suggested that one feel his ulse and then meditate on the fact that fe is galloping on to its close. An old vil- age clock carries this legend, referring to he hours: "Each of them wounds, one of nem finally kills." The poet warns us:

The clock of life is wound but once
And no man has the power to say
Just when the hands will stop,
At late or early hour.
Now only is thine own
To work and labor with a will;
Put no faith in tomorrow,
For the clock may then be still.

As the New Year dawns we look back ver the year that is coming to a close. Blessed are we if we can say truly with the postle Paul in Philippians 3:13: *Forget- ing those things which are behind.*"

I

If we would live effectively, there is one hing we must learn to do with the past. We must learn to forget. The backward look an be ruinous. It made a pillar of salt out f Lot's wife. It has tragically distorted nany another life. Christ said, "No man aving put his hand to the plough, and look- ng back, is fit for the kingdom of God." When a farmer wants to lay down a straight urrow across the field he is about to plow, e had better keep his eyes fixed on some bject on the other side of the field, a tree erhaps, or a post, and then plow straight for t. To look back and admire what he has lready done, or to become worked up about t because it has curves in it, only means hat it will become more crooked still. To est in one's laurels, is to rust on them. To worry about the past, is to warp the present.

That does not mean, of course, that we are o close the past like a book, never to open t again. Some of the pages we'll want to ead frequently. What's behind us is past, ut it is not necessarily gone. It may still ive in us, and we are largely what it has nade us. The years of our life have brought us to where we are now. We have become what we are during all the years that are past; so we do not want to forget entirely where and how we traveled to become what we are. Life is a school in which the Christian especially learns to become better, stronger, more consecrated, and more courageous. We would all like to live certain parts of the past year over again. We are confident we would do things differently and better. Life has no pain more annoying than remorse for opportunities wasted, neglected, or defiled. Perhaps we would not lose our temper quite so easily. We would not condemn our neighbor quite so harshly, because the thing we criticized in his life may now have happened in ours. We would be more ready to forgive those who offend us. We would be more willing to stretch out a helping hand to those who need it. We would be stronger and more determined to say "No" to the temptation we were not able to resist. We ought to know more about the weak point in our character. With one it may be dishonesty; with another, intemperance; with another, immorality. We'll never build strong character by developing weakness. We ought to know enough by this time to avoid every temptation that beckons us where we are weak. Paul, who suggests that we learn to forget, encourages us to: "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

We want to remember the times we turned to God in desperation and cried out, "Lord, help us," and how He did help us; perhaps not just as we expected or desired, but in such a way that we now see more clearly that God does all things well. We don't ever want to forget that. Paul never forgot his experience at Damascus, you can be sure of that. We don't want to take all the past year and simply drop it into a grave. Some things we want to remember.

But as we bury an old year, we'll want to bury a great deal with it. We'll want to bury our resentment. Whether we have lived on main street during the past year or at the end of a long lane, we have exeprienced some of man's inhumanity. Folks have not always been kind to us, or thoughtful, or fair. We'll only hurt ourselves if we take into the new year, in the words of the sacred writer, any root of bitterness that may spring up to trouble us. And we don't want to take with us any disappointments. We've all had them. But to remember them is to distress our life needlessly and to burn up energy and time God wants us to use for better purposes. Paul was a man who had learned how to deal with resentments and disappointments. He forgot them. But when Paul says, *Forgetting those things which*

are behind, he was thinking in particular of something more important.

II

I am very glad it was Paul who said, *Forgetting those things which are behind,* because he had a past that might have been such an impediment in his life, such a stone in his heart, that he would never become the greatest of Apostles. He had a great deal to forget. After all, he was a murderer. He had energetically persecuted the followers of Christ, hounding them out and deliberately putting them to death. He had served as a kind of superintendent at their stonings. As they died, groaning in agony, he had looked on with a great deal of satisfaction. A man does not forget that sort of thing over a week-end or in a lifetime, at least not simply by trying to forget.

But Paul learned to live with the knowledge that his hands were stained with human blood and to serve God happily and effectively. How did he do it? Paul has a message for modern man — for you — that may help you more than a visit to the psychiatrist's office or a month's vacation at the seashore. Paul knew how to deal with the sin in his past life. And who of us does not face the same problem? For some the problem is critical. To quote a few glaring examples: The man and woman and their family of several children, who are respected in the community in which they live, and no one suspects that father and mother are not married, at least not to each other. The husband who is guilty of an act of infidelity committed seven years ago and his conscience won't let him rest. The mother who permitted her crippled child to die and friends sympathized with her in her bereavement. Their kindness haunts her after forty years. The man who was in hiding when another went to prison for him. I've listened to enough confessions, and I know enough about human lives, my own included, to suspect—even if the Bible did not distinctly and repeatedly say so — that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." I am confident that at the basis of much of our modern restlessness is unforgiven sin. Many a life is warped, many a mind is uneasy, many a body is sick, many a soul is dead, because of sin that continues to fester, consciously or unconsciously, in the conscience.

Please listen carefully. What I say to you comes from God's own book. It's God's message to you. Paul had killed men in an effort to wipe out any remembrance of Christ. And Christ became his salvation. After his dramatic conversion at Damascus Paul was no longer a bitter enemy of Christ; he embraced Christ as his dearest friend. That is why he could say, in spite of the terrible sin in his life, *forgetting those things which are behind.*" No matter what kind of mess you've made of your life, no matter how red your face is with shame, no matter how low your head hangs in disgrace, Christ can do for you what He did for Paul. He can help you forget those things which are behind; He can help you lift your head; He can inspire you to face the future happily and confidently.

Perhaps you know the answer, but find it difficult to apply to your own case. A story that Dr. J. C. Massee, formerly of Tremont Temple, Boston, used to tell, may help you. In his early ministry he returned one time to Georgia to visit with his mother and little brother. He found his little brother busily engaged in making mudpies and by no means was all of the mud in the pies. After a hearty exchange of greetings with the soiled little fellow, Dr. Massee entered the house to see his mother. The old homestead had a "spare bed room" especially for visiting preachers and missionaries. For the members of the family, especially the children, that room was forbidden territory. If someone had to enter, he had to be very careful not to touch the white bedspread. In time Dr. Massee and his mother started to look for the little brother—he had been so quiet. Where do you think they found the muddy little boy? That's right—in the forbidden room, on the white bedspread, fast asleep. The mother took one look and started for the strap. Unpleasant memories made Dr. Massee feel uneasy. When the mother returned she found her older son with his big body over that of the young brother. Dr. Massee smiled at her and said, "Lay it on, mother. I'll bear his stripes." I guess the mother forgot her anger and the little fellow never got the whipping. I imagine further that the little brother loved his big brother more devotedly than ever before and that he was grateful for such deliverance.

That's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Any sin in our life, no matter how trivial or insignificant it may appear to us or to others, arouses the righteous anger of God. He, too, is just and punishes where punishment is due. The punishment is terrible. There is no doubt about it. The Bible states simply, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," eternally, that is. But we have an old brother, a Savior, God's own Son, who on Calvary's cross said to His Father, "Lay it

Me, Father. I'll bear the stripes." And did. With His stripes we are now healed. od is ready to forgive us if only we'll ac-pt His pardon through faith in Christ the avior. That's why Paul could say, *Forget-ng those things that are behind* — even urder. If God Himself had forgiven him r Jesus' sake, Paul could forget. To con-nue to make one's life miserable over a n God has forgiven for Jesus' sake, is to ow lack of trust in the Savior.

III

"But my sin is different. It is so great d I did it deliberately. I don't see how od can forgive me." I've heard that often om trembling lips. The love of God is so eat, no human being can understand it. od forgave David, didn't he? David, great ild of God, sweet singer of Psalms, played th temptation, committed adultery, de-erately tried to cover up with murder. nder prompting by the prophet Nathan, avid suddenly saw his sin in all its naked rror. Do you want to listen in while a an pours out his sinful heart before God? ead David's plea for forgiveness in Psalm : "Have mercy upon me, O God, accord-g to Thy lovingkindness: according unto e multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out y trangression . . . Create in me a clean art, O God; and renew a right spirit thin me." God forgave David. David learn-l to say, *Forgetting those things which e behind.*" Listen to him sing in Psalm 32: Blessed is he whose transgression is for-ven, whose sin is covered . . . I said, I will nfess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

God knew we would sometimes be so over-come with guilt feelings and remorse that we would find it difficult to accept His for-giveness. That is why He filled the Bible with reassurances in everyday, forceful pic-ture language. David assures us in Psalm 103, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." God forgives and forgets. Through Isaiah God says, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." No sin is so red that it cannot be washed pure white by Christ. Isaiah speaks in confidence to God, "Thou hast cast all my sin behind Thy back." If God throws our sin behind Him, where He can no longer see it, we can forget about it. Through Jere-miah God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." If God does not remember your forgiven sin, why should you fret about it? Paul knew that when a penitent soul confesses its guilt to God and seeks pardon through the merit of Christ, the Savior, God forgives com-pletely, then and there.

I hope the burden of many souls will be lightened as they are overwhelmed with a realization of the boundless love of God in Christ and that they may hear those sweetest of all words from God Himself, "My child, I love you. I forgive you."

Isn't it wonderful that we can leave an old year and all our past life with its sins and shortcomings and say with Paul, *For-getting those things which are behind?.*

etting Sail in the New Year

CHARLES L. SEASHOLES, First Baptist Church, Dayton, Ohio

Ella Wheeler Wilcox was once on a steam-going from New Haven to New York at e turn of the century, and her husband marked on the fact that one ship went st and another west in the same wind. e immediately put that into verse:

One ship drives east and another drives
west
With the selfsame winds that blow;
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales
Which tells the way to go.

The poet went on from that to say some-ing about the voyage of life. But first e shall turn to a time when Paul had an perience with winds and the set of sails. he twenty-seventh chapter of Acts gives us that story, with many of the nautical terms made clearer to us in the Revised Standard Version. The course they followed was determined by the direction they in-tended to go — westward to Rome — by the winds they encountered and had to ad-just to, and by the storm that came up and they had to come through.

With the literal story of the voyage on which Paul set sail, there was a second story. A story of the voyage of life. Because there is a second story, we turn now to the second stanza of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poem:

Like the winds of the sea are the ways
of fate
As we voyage along through life,
'Tis the set of a soul

That decides its goal,
And not the calm or the strife.

It was the set of a sail that literally determined the direction Paul went when he set sail. But in deeper truth, it was the set of his soul that caused him to sail for Rome, to come into the storm and to come through it.

I

"Like the winds of the sea are the waves of fate" is the way the poem reads, but the first fundamental set of Paul's soul was that it was not the ways of fate at all that he had to do with and that had to do with him in his voyage through life. It was the providential purpose of God. Paul came to use a big word for that — predestined. Some people have made that just a form of religious fatalism, but Bernhard Anderson says that the paradox of predestination is that man's free decision is really a response to the initiative of God.

The reason Paul was on that ship at all was because of his mission to the Gentiles, a mission he had chosen, a calling he had undertaken. But as he began to think about it, the conviction grew with him that he did not choose so much as he was chosen and called and "predestined." There was a providential purpose in it from the very beginning, and he even dares to push it back to the very beginning of all things. This would have been morally meaningless unless he had freely chosen it, but it would have been morally unavailable and unavailing unless God had had a providential purpose for him. It followed then that God would carry him through whatever experiences came in the course of this providential purpose.

The old man of the sea in Hemingway's tale comes to the conviction after his thrilling and brave experience with the sea, that "Man can be destroyed, but he cannot be defeated." Paul would say that *he* had not been defeated because God's purpose could not be defeated. That was the fundamental set of his soul which nothing could upset, and nothing could bring him separation from the love of God.

II

In the second place, Paul set sail for Rome by his own decision. He was a prisoner, but he had chosen to appeal to Caesar, as he had a right to do as a Roman citizen. Was it the right decision? Between his appeal and setting sail for Rome he came before the Jewish authorities, Agrippa and Festus, and Agrippa, after hearing Paul's defense, said: "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." Paul had appealed to Caesar, fearing that he would not get a fair trial by the Jewish authorities. Now he finds he would have, and so he would not have had to go to Rome after all. Well, hindsight is always easy to declare. But Paul had made his decision, and that was the set of his soul.

Indeed the decision turned out to have been the right one, because his being in Rome, even in prison, gave him an opportunity for furthering the Gospel. Paul had longed to get to Rome one way or another and it may have been that he even foresaw the ultimate advantage of getting there as a prisoner. Having made the decision with whatever foresight, it was the set of his soul.

But the storm they got into on that voyage was because of the wrong decision made by other people. Earlier in the voyage they had lost so much time because winds were against them or had failed them, that the winter was coming on, and Paul advised them to put in. But the sailors and soldiers overruled him and, being beguiled by a gentle south wind, they set out. The wind soon became a northeaster, and they were in for the storm. Paul said to the men when they gave up all hope, "Men, you should have listened to me and should not have set sail from Crete. But now I bid you, take heart for there will be no loss of life among you but only of the cargo."

This is the point here. Paul was on that ship by his own decision, a right decision. Then a wrong decision made by others brought Paul into difficulties he might not have had. But that did not make him give up his conviction that his original decision had been right. This circumstance of the storm might deflect and delay the course he had set upon, but it could not defeat it. He intended to appear before Caesar, and it was intended that way for him. That was the set of his soul, and it has something for us in the voyage of life. When you make a right decision in accordance with all the light you have, then when others make a wrong decision that messes things up for you in the course of that right decision, do not let their wrong decision divert you from what was the original right course, but rather keep that original purpose firm, and you will come through the stormy time occasioned by the wrong decision of others.

III

Finally, then, the set of Paul's soul was a particular assurance that confirmed the original providential purpose of God and his own decision to set sail. This particular

surance that came to him was the assurance of the Higher Helmsman. On that ship was the captain who ruled and overruled paul about setting out in the approaching inter. But there was a Higher Helmsman that voyage, and there is for the voyage life: "There stood by me this night the ngel of God, whose I am and Whom I serve, nd said, 'Fear not, Paul.' "

Some examples, literal and more than literal, of setting sail on a voyage and on the oyage of life, come to mind. There is Vachel ndsay's interpretation of the experience Christopher Columbus who, by a blunder, hen he sought the East, found this conti-ent.

God, give such dawns as when, his venture o'er,
The sailor looks on San Salvadore.
God, make our blunders wise.
The Higher Helmsman!

Then there was the experience of the au-or of the book of the early war days, *he Raft*. He said that, after he had made a agging anchor of a life jacket, it always made him mad to have people talk about their drifting when, he said, "We did not drift; I did everything I could to steer." With that literal experience is that of John Milton for the voyage of life saying in his blindness:

I argue not against Henven's hand or will,
Nor bate a jot of heart or hope,
But still bear up and steer right onward.

There is finally a contrast between the best that the ancient pagan world could offer for the voyage of life and what Christianity offers. The god of the sea of the ancients was Neptune, and the finest minds and stoutest hearts of the ancient world were Stoics. One of them wrote: "O Neptune, you may save me or you may sink me, but whether you save me or sink me, I will keep my rudder true."

What Christianity offers is "Jesus, Saviour, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea." As you set sail into the new year, make that prayer the set of your soul.

he Best Is Yet to Be

GENE E. BARTLETT, First Baptist Church, Los Angeles, California

In the opening chapter of the Book of oshua is a word which God spoke at a me when Joshua was taking up leader-ip of the people of Israel. The words are ese: "Have not I commanded thee? Be rong and of a good courage; for the Lord y God is with thee whithersoever thou oest." They seem especially appropriate r consideration on this Sunday when we ce a New Year together. What a wonder-l assurance that is to carry with us into e unknown days ahead!

It is clear to any preacher where he needs begin in a sermon like this. None of us ould need to be convinced of the desira-lity of a faith in God's continuing care and rovidence. But there are some stumbling locks for most of us in the way of our oming to that faith we need.

I

First of all, we are faced with the fact at many common experiences of life seem deny God's care. Unless we face this fact ur faith will not be mature enough to be much use. Life is not all light; it has great reas of darkness. It is not all lift; some-mes it is a heavy load. It is not all free-om by any means. We are all bound and mited and shackled in various ways. So, ny faith in the providence of God has to ome to grips with what William James called it—"the common enemy." But perhaps the most penetrating name of all is that simple word "sin" which Paul used to describe those things that say No to God either in our world or in our own hearts. How do you believe in the providence of God when such things are here?

There is much in life that makes it easy to believe in God. The world is filled with causes for wonder. To see life emerge from a single cell, grow into all the complexity of maturity; to see the rising knowledge of a growing life, to sense the unfolding power that comes to a young person; to note the joy and the love and the security of life, to have the surge of health bringing its renewal every day like a wondrous gift; to know the moments of intuition when God is "as near as breathing and closer than hands and feet" — to know these things is to hear the great affirmation of life. If this were the whole of life, there would be neither struggle nor problem in keeping your life.

But I need not say that it isn't the whole of life. There are equally years when life is on the decline and not the upsurge. There are the times of separation made even more agonizing by the very love which you had known before. The picture of life must include pain and struggle and hours of bar-

renness when you cannot believe that a loving God could let such things come to pass. Any faith for the New Year must come to grips with these things too.

But the Christian faith has come to grips with them. Not for just a moment but for generation after generation we have grappled with this side of our need. Somewhere the hand of God must be upholding us in those darker hours as well as in the times of light. He must, surely, be sustaining us when we are called to turn a corner. Only a faith that can come to this conviction is sufficient for our kind of world. That Psalm we all love so much has caught the full scope of our experience. The Lord is our Shepherd when we lie down in green pastures or walk beside still waters. But He is still our Shepherd when we walk through the valley even of the shadow of death. He does not walk with us one place and let us go alone in the other.

In a book that appeared a few years ago, telling of the experience of an American woman who lived in Africa on a rubber plantation with her husband, there is a report of a conversation with a native boy. They had been standing on the top of a hill watching an unusually beautiful sunset. The cloud formations were lighted by the setting sun, and they stood in silence before the drifting drama of light and shadow. When darkness had come the native boy asked, "What do you see this time, Missy?" She replied carefully, "I think that I have seen God." This led him to ask another question. "Missy, I want to ask you something." "What something, Poor Boy?" Her question was an invitation to go on. "When a white person sees God, has God a white face?" asked the boy. Obviously it was a question which had been long on his mind. So the American woman answered with great care. "I did not see His face, Poor Boy," she said, using the name all had for him. "I would fear to look upon the face of God, but I tell you what I think." He was curious. "What's the one you are thinking?" he asked. Then she replied, "I think the side of God's face that is in the sun will be bright, and the side that is toward the night will be dark so that no one can say that the face of God is any color at all." The boy was impressed and finally said, "Missy, tonight in the camp I will tell the people you tell me just now. It can make all we glad."

It was an answer wise in more ways than one. We shall see the face of God when the light is upon it, but we shall see another side of Him in the hours when it is dark. The shadow has its own word to bring o Him.

Some of us may move into this New Yea having faced for these few moments th challenge of the things that deny God' care and then rising above them enter int a new assurance that God also speaks to us "Have not I commanded thee? Be stron and of good courage; for the Lord thy Go is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

II

We must consider a second matter whic stands in the way of a deeper faith. It i our limited understanding as to how Chris can possibly help us today. The New Testa ment is so clear that He is living and rea Our whole faith rests in the conviction tha He emerged victorious even over death an lives on in our hearts and minds. Can w understand any more clearly how Chris helps us today?

Even after years of asking the questior it always leaves us standing before a mys tery. It is just the fact that He does. No for one or two or a few but for countles people this has been the experience. Whe they have opened their lives, Christ ha been their help and their stay. It is a mys tery, but it is a mystery that you can liv upon in confidence.

It was a mystery for John B. Gough wh after seven years of dissipating sat in room one day contemplating suicide. He sav no future, but from deep within him cam an almost forgotten asurance that God wh had come to us in Jesus Christ could sav and restore life, and he walked from tha room with the assurance that led him t forty-four years of ministry seeking to sav other men.

But what about the rest of us, the peopl who will never have their names recorde in the books of Christian history? There i a countless host who rise to say, "God ha been good to me. There have been so man times when I thought I would never com back or never rise above that difficulty but I did." That is the mystery which is reality. What deeper thing could come o the threshold of a New Year than the read iness to live upon it?

Oh, life is full of mysteries we live upor Love is a mystery and so is longing. Ou laws of nature are but descriptions of mys teries and so is the curiosity which dis covered them. The birth of a child is mys tery, but so is death. And in that kind o world the livingness of Jesus Christ is th crowning mystery.

III

"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong
d of a good courage; for the Lord thy
od is with thee whithersoever thou goest."
an you make it your own? God will do
is part if you will do yours. And what is
ur part?

First, say Yes today just as fully as pos-
ble. It may seem to you but a fragment of
ith. But if Christ could give a man his
ght who walked a few yards to a pool to
ash He will also accept what you can
ing as long as it is everything you have.
y Yes today.

Second, renew it every day. Don't for a
oment think that you can take care of it
ce and for all. When Jesus gave us the re-
inders of His continuing presence He chose
e cup and bread, both of which are taken by every man every day if life is to be sustained. So must the assurance of God's providence be taken every day just as regularly as you rest or take nourishment or exercise.

Third, resolve now to come together this year with others who are living by the same assurance. Let the contagion of faith spread to you. Unashamedly affirm that you need fellowship. United we believe, divided we doubt. So, make place now for the fellowship of faith by which your own life will be strengthened.

We shall then face the days together walking with a new assurance which at last is the gift of God. He said, "Have not I commanded thee?" He has the right to do so. We shall take Him at His word, and we shall know how true it is, the promise of His providence.